

Beyond the Threshold

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Summary: The Captain, Chakotay, and Tom Paris are swept away to an alien world where they are forced into captivity by aliens; the men as laborers and the captain as perhaps something more. As they attempt to rescue each other and get home to Voyager, they discover their past has a shocking way of catching up with them.

1. Chapter 1

Captain Janeway, Chakotay, and Tom Paris walked back to the transport site. An M class planet had provided a nice respite on their journey back to Earth. The trip through the Delta Quadrant in recent weeks had been taxing and recent incidents with Klingons and an escape from the Void had made shore leave a welcome reprieve.

Janeway inhaled the uninhabited planet's thick atmosphere perfumed by the swaying pine trees surrounding their rural area.

"Not ready to leave, Captain?" Chakotay asked.

"Nature always deserves another second or two to be appreciated."

"Yes it does."

"Now see," Tom said. "All this dirt and rocks just doesn't agree with me. Give me a nice replicator and warm dry quarters any day."

As the transporter beam enveloped them, Janeway felt her head ache and the sensation of being pulled through space. A few seconds later, she opened her eyes but not to the transporter room she was expecting.

She and her two officers lay on a dirt floor inside a stone cell with heavy metal bars. The dug out cavern was bare save for a dilapidated cot against the back wall.

Chakotay stirred and shook his head and Tom did the same. Janeway slapped her communicator and called for her ship. There was no response. None of them could raise a signal.

"Where are we?" she said. She struggled to her feet and walked unsteadily to the bars. Picking up a loose rock from the dirt floor, she clanged on the metal. "Hello? Is anyone out there?"

A male guard dressed in brown leather pants and metallic encrusted boots appeared. His cloth shirt and brown leather vest fit snug around his waist along with a weapons belt containing small metal discs and a dagger on each hip. Metal cuffs covered his wrists and matching armor covered his chest.

"I am Captain Kathryn Janeway of the Federation Starship Voyager. On whose authority were we taken and why?"

The young guard studied each person for a few moments until his eyes returned to her. "Veneto."

"Veneto?"

The guard spun on his heel and marched away. Chakotay stepped up and called out again but there was no response. He hit the bars. "Hey, we're not quieting down until we get an answer! Hello!"

A hissing noise sounded and Chakotay hit the ground. A fireball flew into their cell and smacked the small cot incinerating it. As the flames died away, Tom helped his First Officer up. "Are you all right?" Tom asked.

Chakotay nodded. "Your turn."

"Fall back against that corner," Janeway ordered, waving the two men towards the back of the cell. "From that trajectory, it'll be the hardest place to try and target us from."

"Who are these people?" Tom said. "Where are we?"

"Not where we are supposed to be," she replied.

"Your species is quite entertaining." A tall man with cropped raven hair and a scruffy beard apprised each of them with his dark eyes. He was dressed in the same leather pants and vest with an overlay of an inscribed metal chest plate. Matching pieces of bejeweled armor wound around his muscular arms and wrists and around his waist was a leather belt filled with the same metal discs and gemstone daggers. "Such spirit," he added. "Your stamina will serve you well."

"Who are you?" the Captain demanded. "Why have you brought us here? Where are we?"

The man bowed. "My apologies. My name is Hayden and I welcome you to Veneto."

"On whose authority have you brought us here?"

Hayden smiled at the regal authority with which Janeway held herself. "You have me at a disadvantage. You know my name but you have not reciprocated with yours."

"If you had been here earlier, you would have heard it. I am Captain Kathryn Janeway of the Federation Starship Voyager."

"You are charged with defense?"

"Among other things."

"You did not do your job very well, Captain Kathryn Janeway."

"I wasn't aware I was under attack."

"An excuse. You should always be prepared for the unknown and the stronger, more calculating opponent."

"Why have you brought us here?" she demanded.

"Do you believe I am stronger than you, Captain?"

"You do seem to have the upper hand at the moment," Chakotay said.

"Good. You acknowledge our superiority. That will keep you alive longer."

Janeway raised her chin. "We acknowledged nothing other than a lack of knowledge about where we are or why."

"Veneto?" Chakotay offered.

"Very good," Hayden said. "A protector who listens, gathers tactical information, and is now waiting for any hints that may enable your escape. Unfortunately, you don't even have a direction to run."

"Well, why don't you give us one?" Janeway said. "Or are you going to tell us why you brought us here and what you want?"

"Curious culture," Hayden said. He looked again at Chakotay. "Your face. You are not of their world. You must come from another place."

"One I'd like to be returned to," he said.

"No, you'll make a nice addition to the labor populace. I'm sure you'll fetch a high price at auction." He reached through the bars. "You on the other hand I may have other plans for."

Chakotay caught his wrist. "_Don't _touch her."

Hayden's eyes grew dark and he drew a jeweled dagger from his waist. "Never touch me or give me an order that you can't back up. Ever! Marco!"

The original guard appeared his hand on his weapon belt.

Holstering his knife, Hayden said, "Get them ready for transport."

"Wait," Janeway said. "We haven't finishedâ€|"

"Question and answer time is over," Hayden said. "The rest you'll learn as you go. Right now it is time to prepare for what is to come. Take the men to auction holding. She goes to the guest quarters for now. I want to get a better feel for where her special talents may be most useful to us. If anyone is a discipline problem, fire them. I really don't expect they'll fetch much without notice."

More guards advanced and a plume of fire shot into the cell again. It smacked the wall leaving a scorch mark in its place. The fiery display gave the guards the moment they needed to subdue their three now apparent hostages.

2. Chapter 2

"Where have you been?" At the top of the marble steps in the center of a dark cavern, a petite blonde woman lounged on her throne picking at her long nails with a small knife.

"Welcoming our unexpected arrivals," Hayden said.

"Anything good?"

"I didn't realize we were expecting today.

"Neither did I." The woman sat up and walked down the stairs until she hovered just above his face. "Find a new plaything?"

"You know you're my only plaything, Molly. I was simply admiring your haul."

"Since I didn't order one, stop admiring! You have no idea who she is. Besides, I need your attention on other things." Molly holstered her knife. "Now, what do you want?"

"What I want is to see you persuade the others of the wisdom of our expansion plans."

"And who do you see as the leader of that push?"

"You, of course, with me by your side. Hasn't that been our plan from the beginning?"

"Plans change." She ascended back to her chair.

"Well mine haven't. And if our plans have changed, I need to know."

She spun around and said, "You'll know what I want you to know, Hayden. You're always too involved with the laborers. I don't like it."

"Well, someone has to sort through the casts to avoid any unintentional visitors." He walked up her stairs. "Are you really jealous of a little bit of fun here and there? Perhaps if we had more of our own momentsâ€¦"

Molly closed her eyes and waved him off. "I don't care about your male needs."

"Then what do you care about, Molly?"

Her eyes flew open. "I will solidify our position with the other seats. How are the meetings coming?"

"The Planet Council will be meeting soon to discuss our proposal."

"Our show of strength will be sufficient?"

"As always, my lady."

"Don't call me that."

Hayden reached the top and loosened his weapons belt. "Why not?"

"Because." She pulled him close. "I'm not really a lady."

Hayden nuzzled her neck. "Thank the gods."

Captain Janeway looked around her new jail cell. A large four pillar bed crafted out of marble was draped in white, silver and gold silks with a red velvet overlay. The cavern's stone walls were dressed in various metallic fabrics throughout although there were no windows or any other openings that she could discern that they covered.

A small bathroom also dug from the stone that surrounded her shone impeccably and radiated warmth. In fact, every piece of stone she touched in the room was warm to the touch. She passed her hand over a circular disc on the left side of the sink and steaming hot water poured into the basin. A wave over the right turned it ice cold. An enormous adjacent bathtub, under better circumstances, would have been an extremely welcome gift.

Janeway splashed cool water over her dusty face and dried it on a plush towel warmed by the stone holder it hung on. A knock at the door brought her back into the bedroom.

An old woman entered dressed in a long flowing silk dress adorned with intricate metallic accents. Her grey hair was held up by what appeared to be a thin silver metallic wire that flashed brilliantly as it weaved in and out through her strands.

Laying a similar looking outfit on the bed, she studied the captain. "I see you found the bathroom. Good. He will want to see you dressed in this tonight."

"Hayden?"

The woman nodded.

"I don't really care what Hayden wants especially since he is holding my crew and I captive against our will."

The woman frowned and shook her head. "You do not want the guards to bathe and dress you. They are not gentle and they tend to take liberties where they shouldn't. I strongly suggest you do what you're told. You'll feel better and I'm sure your mood will improve once you

get cleaned up and out of those restrictive clothes." She left and locked the door behind her.

"Well, if I must." Janeway walked over and started her bath. Picking up the silk clothes, she said, "Hayden, I am going to prepare myself for you in more ways than one."

Chakotay paced the crowded holding area and menaced any man who crossed into his personal space. Most had a humanoid appearance and congregated in familiar groups to plot and quietly survey the area no doubt looking for their own means and opportunity to escape.

Tom watched Chakotay march back and forth while he too took in the teeming sea of species around him. Everyone was unkempt and, although Tom expected the air to be foul, a steady plume of steam above them was obviously cooling and filtering the underground air.

The holding area itself, like everything else around them, was completely dug from stone. The smooth benches and tables were littered with resting bodies awaiting their next set of barked instructions from the ever present guards. A loading door was the only entrance or exit and it was heavily guarded by the brown leather brigade.

Chakotay kicked at the bottom of the stone bench.

"Breaking your foot isn't going to do us any favors," Tom said.

"You have a better idea?" Chakotay rubbed a hand over his close cropped hair. "This is a labor camp."

"I wonder what kind of labor we are going to be doing? I might be able to brush up on my penal colony skills."

"Look around you, Paris. Stone carvings, guards adorned with metal work, intricate insigniasâ€¦" He sat down. "My guess is this is a mining colony. Hard dirty work even with the technology we know. Judging from the looks of it, I'll bet they haven't figured out anything better. We need to get out of here now and find the captain."

"I know. Look at the way this steam is rising. It has to escape somewhere above ground. If we follow it, maybe we can get up to the surface and contact Voyager."

"Voyager?" A large man in dank clothing walked up.

"This is a private conversation," Chakotay said.

"Not private anymore. Sounds like a great plan. You got a ship? Great. How are we going to use it to get us all out of here or do I go tell the sentry over there all about your private conversation?"

Tom and Chakotay exchanged glances and the First Officer patted the bench next to him. "Why don't you take a seat?"

Janeway walked into the small room she and four other girls had been escorted to for dining. The room was the same stone floor to ceiling cavern decorated with marble silk covered chairs around a large

intricately carved stone table. Two girls huddled together while Janeway and the other two each claimed their seats.

The soft navy silk dress the captain had put on was a little too low cut for her taste. Her hair had dried and hung simply around her neck affording her some small coverage. The gold metallic wire that she was sure was meant to thread through it went unused as she had no idea or even inclination to attempt the elaborate design.

A far better use for the sturdy yet flexible wire was as a weapon to wrap around her enemy's neck or to subdue an aggressor's hands behind their back. She decided to secrete it around her leg under her dress.

She wiggled a few of the metallic dress adornments. They were secure but not so secure that they couldn't be ripped off quickly. Their sharp metal edges could be used to disable someone. Curious, she thought, for such a heavily guarded society to be so careless as to give their captives several methods to do some serious damage to their captors. All she needed now was the opportunity.

She noticed one of the girls staring at her. "Hello. Do you know this place?"

The small girl dropped her eyes and turned away.

"You must be new."

Janeway looked at the young girl seated next to her. She had red hair and porcelain skin with a hint of freckles dusted across her pert nose.

"Yes, I am, in a manner of speaking."

The girl sniffed. "What planet do you come from?"

"It's a long story."

"All of ours are."

"Where are you from?" Janeway asked.

"Here, well, Molti actually."

"Molti?"

"It's on the other side of the planet."

"I see. The planet Veneto?"

"Yes. Hayden tired of me so I'm being redistributed. You must be my replacement."

"Redistributed?"

"You really are new, aren't you?" She moved her chair closer to the captain. "You must be a corridor baby. Probably still have the headache."

"Corridor baby?"

"Most corridor babies say it makes their head ache horribly to come here. About the time Molly decides to expand our territory again, my guess is your whole planet, wherever it is, will soon become Canti guests."

"Canti guests?" Janeway shook her head. "I'm sorry. This is all very new to me."

The woman patted her hand and pointed a finger. "This planet you're on is called Veneto. We rule most of the sectors of space in this area. The head province is Canti. That's where we are now. There are three other provinces; Neve which is below Canti and Umbry and Molti which are across the waters. Surrounding our planet are corridors that travel in, out, and away from us.

"In the beginning, the council used these tunnels to trade with and explore other neighboring star systems. Everything was civil and above board. But then, certain factions thought we could do more with the tunnels and they started 'borrowing' rather than trading and one thing led to another and before you knew it we started trouble.

"Others can't really enter our corridors safely to get to us so we were able to take what we wanted including people who ended up doing the labor the Venetons didn't want to do anymore. It was nice. We got used to it.

"First the council brought men to do the hard labor. Then they brought the women to entertain and do the lighter work. And then when supplies ran short, the council started to find other planets and species to fill in the gaps."

Janeway was horrified. "An entire planet based on slavery?"

"By the time, Molti and Umbry started to voice concerns over what was going on in Canti, the business was in full swing. And those that protested disappeared or were pressed into service like me. Now Molly and her faction are so strong, no one dares to speak against her. She has too many protectors even though I've never really heard of her before now."

"Has anyone ever been able to go back?"

"Back through the corridors to their homes?" The young woman patted her hand again. "None that I've heard of. Besides, you're lucky. You're very pretty. You'll probably be bought by some wealthy man who'll take care of you once Hayden is done. Treat you nice."

The captain drew her hand back. "I don't think so. I have a ship to return to."

"No offense, but you'll be setting yourself up for certain death if you keep that idea in your head."

"I've been through worse."

The young woman looked at her with sad eyes. "I highly doubt that, miss. I highly doubt that."

3. Chapter 3

Janeway returned to her room and noticed her uniform had been taken. The door bolt slid open and Hayden walked in and secured it behind him. His black leather outfit lacked his usual weapon belt. _Good_, she thought. _This is going to be easier than I anticipated._

Hayden eyed her politely. "You look very nice."

"Is this standard fare on your world?"

"Yes." Hayden circled her. "Looks and spirit."

She fondled one of the metal adornments and glanced behind to mark his position. "Do you always pick out companionship for the night?"

Hayden stopped. "Companionship? Is that what you want?"

"I thought that was what was expected."

He placed a hand across his chest and bowed. "I'm hurt that you would cheapen me that way."

"Why? You've seen fit to cheapen me."

"How so? I've provided you with fresh quarters, clothing&|"

"But not my freedom which I also need. I want my two crew members back and I want us returned to the planet you took us from. Now."

"Why? Do you dislike all of this? You don't approve? Well, then, please, feel free to discard it." Hayden stepped back and crossed his arms apparently waiting for her to disrobe. "And the first thing you may return is the hair piece wrapped around your leg. Carefully, or I will remove it for you."

Janeway met his gaze as she removed the metal wire and handed it over. "Now, give me my uniform back."

"You don't need it anymore."

"I want it. And my crew members. They are to be brought to me and we are to be returned to our original location at once."

Hayden chuckled. "Your request is refused. Besides, I'm sure they've been fired by now. Most useless items are."

"I doubt that. You seem to be in the business of bodies. Why discard what you obviously need?"

"You haven't even begun to explore my planet or its needs."

"I'll skip the tour. Return me and my crew. Now."

"I don't think so. You may still be useful to me."

"And how long before I become useless?"

"That, Captain, is up to you."

"What do you want from me, Hayden?"

"Ah, so you have finally chosen to address me in the familiar rather than as an enemy combatant. Is this genuine frustration or a new tactic?" He smiled as she leveled another glare. "You are to be commended, Captain. Always strategizing." He brushed her cheek. "We are a lot alike you and me."

Pulling back, she said, "I doubt that."

He rubbed his fingers together. "Aren't I the least bit intoxicating to you?"

"No." She moved away as a knock on the door interrupted.

"Enter!" he commanded.

The old woman was back rolling a large food cart carrying bread and fruit. She bowed and then left and latched the door behind her.

"You must be hungry," Hayden said. Motioning towards the small table in the corner, he said, "Shall we?"

"I've already eaten, thank you."

"No, you consumed only information in the dining hall. Besides, I'd rather not eat alone. Sit down, please."

Janeway moved to one of the two chairs at the small table and took a seat.

"Thank you." Hayden made up two plates with a variety of selections from the cart, placed one in front of her, and sat down. Unrolling a cloth, he placed it in his lap and bowed his head. "May the gods bless this food and those in whose company we sit."

"You believe in gods?" she asked.

"Yes, we believe in gods," he said. "We are descended from them and though they may not roam our plane anymore, we still honor those who came before us. Is that not your world's custom?"

"Your gods are omnipotent beings."

Hayden shook his head. "They were just like us. They are us. That's why we honor them."

"I see," she said. "You have a lot in common with my First Officer. He also honors his ancestors very much and speaks to them often. Why don't you bring him here and he'll tell you all about it?"

"Still at it, Captain." He put down a piece of bread and said, "What do you mean he speaks to them?"

"Why don't you bring him here and he'll show you."

"Why don't you show me? How is it done?"

"He's much better at it than I am."

"Show me."

"I need his help. He is the expert in performing vision quests."

"Quests? You travel the spirit world?"

"Yes, we do."

Hayden pushed his food away and sat back. "Care to explain how you do that?"

"No." She leaned towards him. "I would never give up my only means of escape. I will be forced to use it if you won't send me back yourself."

He rubbed his hands together. "If that were true, I wouldn't be enjoying your company right now."

"Not so. I just choose not to leave my friends behind."

"You are a very poor liar, Captain Kathryn Janeway. If all three of you could travel, you would have done so by now instead of plying me with your demands. If one of you could, your training would also compel you to leave and bring back reinforcements for a rescue operation."

She moved away and took a bite of bread.

"I see I still have the upper hand. You are a challenge. Someone to be watched. It's been a long time since I've had such a worthy adversary. I truly hope you don't disappoint."

"Tell me, am I a momentary pleasure for you or are you trying to figure out how to recruit me?" She smiled as his eyes narrowed. "Perhaps if you just asked me to join you, Hayden, I could be more than your adversary. We could be partners."

"How quickly your desires change. For you, it would be the ultimate position to gain everything you needed; the lay of the land, important contacts, and the power to find your friends and mount an eventual escape plan. Fortunately, you're not the first woman to offer herself for ulterior motives."

"What you are afraid of?"

He grabbed her wrist and banged the table with his other hand. "I am afraid of nothing! Do not ever mistake my good manners for decency. I can become very indecent very quickly and you would do well to remember that." Standing up, he said, "Thank you for dinner. I will enjoy your company again soon."

She rose and said, "Call me Kathryn. I now understand I am no longer the captain I once was. You win, Hayden."

He nodded. "You are correct. Good night, Kathryn."

Chakotay felt his way through the dark tunnel. His hands were slippery with blood, a result of the numerous sharp edges that cut him along the jagged stone passageway. Tom's heavy breathing echoed in the darkness as he followed behind.

For Tom's communicator, the man in the holding room had traded information about a secret passageway out of the detention center that would lead to a rebel stronghold. The man had promised with his new gadget in hand that he would get a message to the leader and vouch for their arrival.

The rebels, he had explained, had operatives inside the hold to seek out new recruits, new ideas, and new information crucial to their mission. It would be a long dirty climb, the man warned, but they would be among friends at the end.

Tom inquired if anyone had ever escaped from Veneto. The man's quick wishes of good luck and a safe journey told them all they needed to know.

"How much longer?" Tom asked.

"I'm not sure. He didn't exactly give us a map."

"You have to see something. There must be a light somewhere."

"Yeah at the end of the tunnel which we're not at yet," Chakotay said.

Tom sat back. "You don't have a sense of anything? No feel for the land?" He wiped the sweat off his dirty brow. "I thought you would have more skills than this, Chakotay. I know it's not your native land but, at least, brush up a little since the last time you and I were crawling through an underground tunnel together to save our lives."

Chakotay turned around. "You know as smart as you are, Paris, you're really ignorant sometimes. It's what gets you into trouble."

Tom nodded and moved back onto all fours. "Disciplinary report noted. If we ever get back to the ship, I promise I'll take the first sensitivity class Tuvok offers. Let's go."

4. Chapter 4

Janeway paced in her room and tugged at the long dress. She had spent half the night searching for an opening, a crack, anything that may lead to a way out. After a quick nap and a morning breakfast that was delivered by another non-talkative woman, she was getting anxious and bored. She decided to do one more cursory inspection. A sharp jolt of electricity sat her down hard and made her head swim.

"You won't find anything. There is no way out," Hayden said.

"How did you get in here?"

"It was not through any concealed or secret passageway, I can assure you."

"I would have heard the door. That bolt is loud enough."

"Are you sure? You were concentrating pretty heavily on subverting my hospitality." He nodded towards the bed. A full black leather jumpsuit similar to his lay across it along with an empty weapons belt. "Since you dislike your dress so much, here is your new wardrobe."

Janeway walked over and picked up the belt. "This will do me no good empty."

"Those items you must earn. Get dressed. I think you'll be more comfortable in it although that dress is still lovely on you." He ran his hand down her neckline and she quickly moved away.

She walked into the bathroom and changed. The new jumpsuit covered everything except for her arms. The top was fashioned as a v neck with no sleeves giving her full range of motion and the rest of the suit was surprisingly flexible despite its leather appearance.

"My assignment?" Janeway asked.

"Not so fast. You must be trained and more importantly tested."

"I can handle any challenge you give me. I'm very glad you decided to trust me, Hayden."

"Trust must also be earned. I have no doubt of your skills. I'm sure your previous training will stand you in good stead. However, I'm more interested in your loyalty. You are an unwilling recruit and that makes you the most dangerous member of any militia. You have an internal agenda that may not be compatible with our goals."

"Well, you've made it clear that I'm not going home. There is no precedent for returning me to where I've come from. I'd rather not spend my days locked away in a room inventing ingenious methods of breaking your neck or anyone else's after I've become insane with boredom."

He chuckled and brushed a strand of loose hair from her face. "My world has many driven females. But it is rare to find one from the outside that does not lose her strength when she is repopulated. I do not trust you, Kathryn Janeway. You will prove that you deserve this opportunity to find your own way here. You will betray me as you test my boundaries and this world's parameters and I will overlook them as the small temper tantrums you must perform before finally accepting your new life here. However, make no mistake. I will kill you if I determine you are no longer worth the effort. That is your first and final warning."

"How was she?" Molly paced around Hayden's huge conference table, her fingers trailing along the cool black stone.

Hayden was seated behind a matching black marble desk in his private cavern studying his padd. "How was who?"

She perched herself on the edge of his desk. "You're latest flame."

"Which one?"

Molly grabbed his padd and flung it against the stone wall shattering it into pieces.

"That was our latest tactical data."

"I don't care."

"Why doesn't that surprise me?" He stood up and said, "You seem to have no investment in our plans, Molly. Why is that? Our support is waning in Moltis. We'll need to remedy that if you want to maintain the Moltese corridors at their current casting levels."

"What? Stefan has always been loyal to me. Why would he test us now?"

"Probably because you didn't give him the troops he wanted to help quell his rebellions. The protesters are getting very active in his sector. We are losing valuable resources in that province."

Molly paced around the table again. "It's high time they were dealt with."

"I agree," Hayden said. "The problem is finding them. Most of their followers are scattered around the old tunnel networks."

"Then we must seal off their access," Molly said.

"Where do you want to start? Tactical shows that most seem to be moving in from Neve."

"Neve?" Molly waved her hand. "No. That's not true."

"It is and you would know it if you read one of those things instead of breaking them. You'd also know it if you spoke to your brother."

"Well, you handle the details then! That's what you're here for. I have a much more pressing matter at hand."

"Which is?"

Molly waved her hand again. "Nothing to concern you."

"It does concern me since it is distracting you," he said. "What is it?"

She faced him and said, "Gene's gone missing."

"Your brother? Captured? When? Why am I hearing about this now?"

"Everything will be okay. He probably just couldn't handle all of this or maybe he actually did go looking to findâ€¦" She shook her head. "No. No! For his sake, he better be among the tunnel walls because it will be a much more pleasant experience for him than if I get my hands on him and find out he went after them. He can't do that. Not without me!"

"What are you talking about?"

"Don't question me!"

"I will question you when it concerns us! This is not a game!" Hayden drew a deep breath. "Your brother has always voiced concerns about tactics but his loyalty has always been solid."

"His loyalty has always been silent."

"What does that mean? Brother or no brother he needs to be dealt with if he is threatening our plans."

"This has nothing to do with our plans. This is personal." She walked back. "I know what he is up to. My brother has access to the casting runs at Neve."

"Of course he does. He's the commander of their militia. Or was from the sound of it."

"Those three that came in yesterday," she said. "They came to us but we didn't cast for any new property. I'll bet if you pull Neve's logs, he did. He cast for them but delivered them here to us."

"Why?" Hayden said. "Who are those three to him? Why here? Why not Neve?"

"Because his unauthorized cast was detected and he needed to drop them a shorter distance which is us." She pointed her finger. "You're new girlfriend and her two companions. He purposely brought them here."

"Okay but why? They didn't seem to know us or this place. That woman captain has been all over anyone for information to leave here."

"Captain?" Molly said. "Of the Starship Voyager?"

Hayden stared. "How did you know that? I haven't named her in any of my reports."

"You didn't have to. I want her and the others brought to me. Now!"

"Who is she? Are these friends or foes your brother has brought in? Is she with us or with the rebellion?"

"I will handle my brother. I want those three and him brought to me at once. Gene is not to be harmed in any way. If he is, I will kill you and anyone else I find responsible for it."

"Molly..."

"You have your orders. Implement them! Now!"

5. Chapter 5

Chakotay noticed a glimmer of light behind the small bundle of rocks ahead. Relief washed over him as he stopped and sat back. They had

journeyed in silence for the past several hours and the long, dirty climb was getting old with hunger and thirst beginning to take their toll.

"Why did you stop?" Tom asked.

"Because I think I see a crack of light. Maybe an exit or entrance to something."

"Great, let's go. I could use some fresh air."

Chakotay glanced behind. "That fresh air might be supplying people we don't want to meet. We have to make sure it's friendly air before we step into it, Paris."

Tom lagged against the tunnel wall. "And how are we supposed to do that?"

"Why don't you take one for the team and go introduce yourself? You're the friendly one here."

"And if they aren't friendly, they kill me and you carry on by yourself?"

"Yes, that's the plan and, with any luck, they'll kill you before you can even give me up."

"Trust me; I can talk fast enough to give you up before they incinerate me. Besides, you're my senior officer. You have a duty to protect me. Shouldn't you go first?"

Pointing his finger, Chakotay said, "Stay here and shut up."

Carefully, Chakotay inched towards the rock barrier. He got about ten feet from it when an audible hum sounded. Rocks blasted apart pelting them with several jagged pieces. Hot fire balls whipped and burned their skin. A man's voice barked an order and the attack ceased. The flying rocks settled and rolled away as the fireballs extinguished.

"I've really had about enough of that!" Tom said.

Chakotay's face was hot and tight likely the result of being singed by the close fire. Forcing an eye open, he saw a large cavern in front of him where the rock face had been. Several men stood with their fists outstretched. Chakotay held up his red and bloody hands.

"Who are you?" A man with blond hair pulled back into a ponytail addressed them. He wore the standard Veneto uniform except his leather was colored blue with copper metallic accents.

Tom crawled up behind and put his head over Chakotay's shoulder. "We're not your enemies. We're looking for Gene. We were told in the holding area that he and the other people here could help us." He toggled Chakotay's communicator. "You know this?"

The blond man studied them and gestured for the others to lower their hands. "You've come from the holding facility?"

"Yeah, nice place. I'm Tom and this is my friend Chakotay."

"Tom." The young man walked forward into the tunnel and his blue eyes swept over the pilot. "I see you now. You are really here. Yes, please, come in."

Tom patted his First Officer on the shoulder.

"Please. Come," the man said. "I'm the one who brought all three of you here. I've been waiting to meet you."

Tom was brought to his feet by the leader as Chakotay allowed a guard to help him from the passageway.

Inside the cavern, a large marble table and chairs were placed off to the side with padds, stone dishes, cups and jugs of a red colored liquid that looked like wine strewn across it as if a meeting had just been interrupted.

"I am Gene," the blond man said.

"You're Gene?" Tom said. "You brought us here? To this planet? Why?"

Gene took Tom into an uncomfortable embrace and then pulled back and gestured towards Chakotay's burns. "He tripped the security field. We will have him healed. I don't think you regenerate quite like I do."

"Uh, we regenerate but it takes us some time. But we'd appreciate the help. By the way, next time, put the force field down and hold off on the fire when you are expecting guests." Tom put out his hand and Gene held out his. Tom took it and shook firmly. "This is hello and we mean no harm back where I come from."

Gene nodded. "I know where you come from."

"You do?"

"Earth."

Tom briefly met Chakotay's confused gaze with his own. "How do you know that?"

"Because I have your memories, Father."

"Father?" Tom stepped back. "What did you just call me?"

"Father. I wanted to know my father and my mother. That's why I brought you both here."

"Excuse me?" Tom held up his hands. "Me and your, your mother? Do I know her?"

"Yes and I know you. You, Lieutenant Tom Paris and Captain Kathryn Janeway, are my parents."

Tom exhaled and rubbed his face. "I think you have us very confused with somebody else. The Captain and I are not...we've neverâ€|"

Gene nodded as Tom's eyes widened. "You remember me now."

Tom dropped to the ground to steady himself and struggled for another breath. He wiped away a sweat that now had nothing to do with the cavern's warm temperature.

Chakotay found his voice and said, "You're not you, but you're human. You and the other two were not."

"The Vidlians located us in the jungle as we were. Reptilian. They experimented with our DNA. They turned us into this."

"Vidlians?" Chakotay repeated.

"They took me and my sister and our brother. Our brother did not survive the lab before we escaped." Gene looked at Tom who rose from the ground. "I assume since my mother is not with you, we will need to rescue her from Hayden?"

"You are the one who is in need of rescue." Hayden walked in as the cavern was invaded by several of his brown men. The blue brigade flashed fireballs into their palms.

"Put your fire down and you will live," Hayden commanded. "I only came for your leader and the two escapees. The rest of you will leave with your lives _if _you follow my instructions now."

Gene gestured to his men and their fireballs were quickly extinguished. "Take me to my sister, Hayden. I have someone she needs to meet."

6. Chapter 6

Molly paced around her throne. "Guard!"

Marco appeared at the bottom of the steps.

"Where is my brother? Where are the people I asked for a full hour ago? I want them in my presence. Now!"

"Hayden has returned with them. He has gone for the woman now. Our legion is bringing the prisoners in as we speak. Your brother will be arriving with them."

"My brother is not a prisoner. Only the two this woman came with. Is it that difficult to pull two people from an auction?"

"Unfortunately, my lady, they were not where they were supposed to be. We had some difficulty locating the two new arrivals from yesterday but Hayden managed to locate their whereabouts and has brought them to us."

"Difficult? Difficult?" she repeated. She raised a hand and aimed it at him. "Give me one reason why I shouldn't fire you right now?"

Several more guards appeared with Gene, Tom, and Chakotay in tow. Tom

and Chakotay were bound with metal cuffs while Gene disengaged himself from the grasp of a guard. He looked up and said, "Put your hand down, Molly. You and I both know it is an empty threat."

"Guards, all of you, leave! Leave the prisoners and my brother. I will handle them."

"But, my lady," Marco protested. "You're safetyâ€|"

"Leave, now!" she commanded.

Marco and the other guards departed leaving her alone with the three men. She walked down the steps. "You, my brother, would really be so foolish as to announce that we are not of this world? That would have gotten you and I both killed. I've already lost one brother. I won't lose you too."

Her eyes swept over Tom and Chakotay. She settled on Tom as she hit the bottom. Gene followed her as she walked in front of the pilot. "You."

Tom opened his mouth to speak but her hand shot out and smacked him across the face. With a knee she leveled at his midsection, he fell to the ground gasping for air. Jumping on his chest as he rolled over, she pulled her dagger and held it against his throat. "Finally. Finally, I get to kill you, Father."

Chakotay moved to kick her off but, with his hands bound behind him, he was quickly upended by Gene.

"Don't hurt my sister!"

"Then tell your sister not to hurt my officer!" Chakotay yelled.

"Wait," Tom said. Her knife drew blood against his throat. "I don'tâ€|I'm sorry. I didn't really mean for us to meet this way. I didn't know thatâ€|I didn't know you and your brothers were...I...We, we all thought that you would neverâ€|"

"Tom!" Janeway walked in with Hayden by her side. She made a run at Molly but was caught by Hayden's grip and held tight. "Tom! Chakotay!"

"I'm all right, Captain," Chakotay said.

"I'm not," Tom said. "A little help here, please?"

"Silence!" Molly pressed her knife deeper and Tom coughed.

"Molly, don't!" Gene said. "He's your father!"

"Father?" Janeway said. She felt Hayden's grip loosen and she pulled free. "What is this about? Who are you? Release my officer, now!"

Molly jumped up and brandished her knife at the captain. "Well, well, well. The person I've most wanted to meet my entire life. Hello, Mother."

Janeway's eyes darted with a pair identical to her own. "What is this? Who are you?"

"Molly, please." Gene grabbed his sister's arm but she shoved him away.

"After what they've done to us? How Owen suffered? You know, I was against finding them but you were right. This is much more satisfying to know them and now to get to kill them."

"No." Gene said. "I didn't bring our parents here for that."

"Then for what? For what, brother? Did you just want to say hello and get a hug?"

"What is all this about?" Janeway repeated. "Who are you? Why did you bring us here to your planet?"

"Our planet?" Molly laughed. "This is not our planet. You don't even recognize your own children or where you left us."

Tom scrambled to a sitting position. "They look a lot different now, Captain."

Molly jumped at Janeway again. "We are the ones you left to fend for themselves in the jungle. The ones the Vidians came and captured and mutilated into this hideous human form. Experiment after experiment until one of your children, our brother, died! Did you feel him die, Mother?"

Janeway watched Molly's knife shake. "I don't know you."

"Liar!" Molly slashed Janeway's arm.

The captain fell back with a cry next to Tom as Hayden intercepted and held Chakotay back.

"The Warp 10 experiment, Captain," Tom said.

"Warp 10?" Janeway pressed her wound as her mind raced. "You meanâ€¦These are...they areâ€¦.they can't be."

"Say it!" Molly said, "Call me who I am! Acknowledge me!"

"Captain, I am so sorry."

Janeway looked up at the angry young woman. "You areâ€¦Molly? I had no idea you could beâ€¦ We never thoughtâ€¦How did thisâ€¦?" She looked at her First Officer.

Chakotay struggled in Hayden's grasp. "Listen to me, Molly. It's not their fault. It was my decision to leave you and your brothers on the planet. Your anger belongs with me."

Molly flashed the knife at him. "Oh you will all die. All of you. Just like my brother did in that lab!"

The captain helped Tom stand up and she loosened the cuffs from his wrists.

"Molly, is it?" Chakotay said.

"Yes," she said. "It was the only name I could remember her calling another child."

"Molly? You have our memories?" Janeway asked.

"Yes," Tom said.

Janeway steadied her breath. "Then you knowâ€¦Molly was myâ€¦she isâ€¦well, it was a name I've always liked."

"It's a name you should have given me yourself."

"Yes, I should have."

"Molly," Gene said. "It's obvious they didn't know. I told you they didn't. We remember them as good people and they are."

"You have no idea who they are. They never fought for us."

"We didn't know you were there to be fought for," Janeway said. "We had no idea this was even possible. We had no idea anyone wouldâ€¦"

"Because you didn't?"

"No!"

"You had no interest but the Vidiians were very interested in three self regenerating life forms with humanoid DNA. They tried to adapt our genetic codes to finally cure themselves of the phage. You left us to die with them!"

"Never! Had we known that would happen, we would have never left you." The captain reached out but Molly slashed her arm again with the blade.

"Don't touch me, Mother! You will never touch me!"

Gene pulled his sister back. "Please don't hurt them anymore. What will that accomplish?"

"It will make me feel better and it will avenge Owen's death."

"Or," Chakotay said. "You can let them do the right thing now and let us take you home."

"You can do that?" Gene asked. "You can take us back to our planet? Turn us back into ourselves?"

"Yes," Janeway said. "If you can return us back to where you took us from, we'll have our Doctor take a look at youâ€¦"

"No more doctors!" Molly said.

"Then stay with us," Janeway said. "The Vidiians would only hunt you again if we took you back. Come home. Let us do what we should have done the first time."

"No. Voyager is not our home," Molly said. "This form is not our body."

Hayden released Chakotay and stepped forward. "There it is. Your full confession. You are not of Veneto. The goddess lied to us. You are every bit the imposter I suspected you to be. Canti is now mine! I will rule here and I will have all of you executed. G-!"

Before he could complete his call for his men, Chakotay kicked Hayden's back leg sending him crashing to the ground. His head bounced off the stone floor and he was still.

"Goddess?" Janeway said.

"Yes, it has a ring to it doesn't it?" Lady Q appeared in a flash garbed in Canti's silks.

"You."

Tom joined the captain as Gene freed Chakotay's hands.

Molly ran up and kneeled at Lady Q's feet. "Please take me back, goddess. Take us back! I don't want to remain like this anymore. I would rather be dead!"

Gene moved forward and knelt next to his sister.

"You're responsible for this?" Janeway said. "As a purported goddess? You did all of this?"

"No," Lady Q said. "You and your fly boy did this. I just decided to have some fun with it."

"Fun?" Janeway approached. "You call this fun? Playing with another species' lives? With all of our lives? For what? Your own amusement?"

"Why not? You interfered with my family. Now, I am now returning the favor and interfering with yours. Don't you think it's ironic that she named herself after a dog?"

"Game's over, Q," Tom said.

Lady Q crossed her arms. "Is it?"

"Yes, Mother," q flashed behind her. "End this now or I will."

"q? How did you find me?"

"The Continuum is not happy with you, Mother."

Lady Q sniffed and shrugged her shoulders. "Obviously your father's thrown a tantrum. No matter. Wait till he sees the fun I'll enjoy now by having him pay for ruining mine. I never interfered with his joy." She looked down at the young couple. "You may rise."

Molly and Gene rose before her.

"I gave you two everything after I rescued you." Lady Q said. "Power."

A planet to rule. Infinite glory for the taking. You were as close to Q as you could get. And you would still rather slide around in the mud. You can take the reptiles out of the jungleâ€| She glanced at the Voyager trio. "Although, on second thought, it could be preferable to remaining with these humans on board that ship. Still rowing towards home?"

"You messed with my kids," Tom said. "And with my captain. You took a bad situation I created and used it to hurt a lot of people I care about."

Lady Q looked down her nose at the pilot. "Whatever will you do?"

"Plenty."

Lady Q laughed.

"q, can you help us?" Janeway asked.

"I'll take you home, Aunt Kathy. And I can return these two to that planet in whatever form they want and I'll make sure no one ever bothers them again."

"I forbid it," Lady Q said.

"You can do that?" Molly asked.

"They're gods," Gene said. "They can do anything. Could you also bring our brother back?"

q shook his head. "Not even a Q can do that."

"They are no gods," Janeway said. "They are simple beings just like you and me."

"I beg your pardon," Lady Q said.

"Please, stay with us. Let us get to know you. We're really much better than our first impression."

Molly slowly shook her head. "No. I want to go home."

Janeway nodded. "I understand that feeling."

"Do you?" Molly's face darkened. "You'll know a lot more feelings once I'm done with you." She glanced at Tom and said, "Both of you will."

"Is that a threat?" Tom asked.

"Yes. You'll be sorry you ever made me." She turned back to Lady Q. "Take me with you, Goddess. Teach me."

"Molly," Gene said. "You can't go with her. You can't leave me."

Molly cupped her brother's cheek. "You're right, brother. I can't leave you all alone in this world. Not like this."

Gene smiled until he felt her knife plunge into his chest.

"Goodbye, sweet brother."

"No!" Janeway grabbed Molly's arm but the woman's limb came off in the captain's hands as Molly pulled away.

Gene's body dropped into Tom's arms. "Gene," he whispered.

Janeway dropped Molly's unattached arm to the ground. "Why? Why did you do that?"

"I still have some of my old tricks," Molly said as she stepped next to Lady Q. Her replicate arm began to form. "You're next, Mother. And then you, Father."

Lady Q raised her hand and, with a snap and a flash, they were gone.

The cavern was quiet as Janeway knelt and brushed her hand across Gene's forehead. "I am so sorry. For everything." She looked up at q who slowly shook his head.

"Captain." Chakotay knelt down and put his hands on her shoulders.

"How did this happen, Chakotay?"

Tom couldn't meet her eyes his captain's eyes as she brushed a few tears away and stood up. Clearing her throat, she said, "qâ€|"

"I will make sure the Continuum knows what my mother did here."

"That's not enough," Tom said. "This is my fault."

"No," the captain said. "This belongs on Q and Q alone. The Vidlians had help locating them. They had to be pointed in the right direction." She lifted her eyes to q. "I've known the Q to be a lot of things but never, never this."

"I promise you, Aunt Kathy, she will be dealt with."

"I will hold you to that." Janeway looked down at Gene's body.

"Whenever you're ready," q said. "I can take him back to his planet and bury him there. I'll make sure it is a place that is never disturbed again."

"Thank you."

"See Aunt Kathy, I'm learning."

She smiled and said, "It's nice to see, q."

Chakotay put his arm around his captain and nodded at q. "Whenever you're ready. We need to get her wounds addressed."

q snapped his fingers and, in a flash, returned Gene to his final

resting place and the trio back to Voyager with no memory of their past two days. In a millisecond, everything was at it should have been. His gift to them.

The Captain, Chakotay and Tom Paris stepped off Voyager's transporter pad together. Janeway nodded at her transporter chief and said, "I'm going to miss that fresh air. But it's back to duty for all of us."

"Yes, ma'am,"

"Yes, Captain."

As they walked to the bridge, Lady Q and Molly flashed into the ready room. Molly looked around her mother's desk and spied a picture of Janeway's dog, Molly. Picking it up, she hurled it to the floor shattering the glass and the picture frame.

"Something to remember me by, Mother. Something to remember me by."

End
file.